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# THE GREAT PARALLEL

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*Reprinted from*  
"The New York Tribune"  
of November 2nd, 1916.

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MCMXVII.

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# THE GREAT PARALLEL

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Fifty-two years ago the American people had to decide the question which now faces the British and French people. In the spring of 1864 the whole North had looked forward to Grant's campaign for Richmond with hope and confidence. Gettysburg and Vicksburg had been won, the campaign in Tennessee had turned, there were obvious evidences of the beginning of the decline of the resources of the South. The Confederate press no longer talked of a peace dictated at Washington; rather it declared the war had become a deadlock, and on the defensive it claimed the South was invincible.

But a few months later the terrible costs and the bitter disappointments of the campaign from the Wilderness to Cold Harbor had brought its consequences. Losses more terrible and more sustained than the Civil War had hitherto inflicted had not brought victory. Grant's brilliant reputation had been dimmed by what seemed then a failure, and before Petersburg the army of Lee stood as firmly as the Germans now stand at the Somme.

In that hour, as in the present, there were not lacking those who agitated for peace, men and women moved by the horror of the slaughter, men and women unnerved by the terrible summer and the relative failure. To them peace at any price and under any condition seemed better than further killing. "Erring sisters, go in peace!" became quite as familiar as the similar "slogans" of to-day.

The question was referred to the people of the North. There was a direct vote in the national election of 1864. And the voice of the people of the North was unmistakable. All hope of any end but a decision vanished when the votes had been counted and the determination of the millions of the "plain people" who were bearing the burdens, the sorrows and the tragedies of the conflict was made manifest.

And this vote was determined by one thing. Looking clearly and calmly, with prophetic vision, the people of the North in that day perceived that it would be impossible to attain enduring peace on this continent if the Union were shattered. They saw their future and the future of their children face to face, and they willed that the war should go on. They perceived that all the terrible sacrifices of the previous years would go for nothing if there were not a final decision.

There were not lacking in 1864 European statesmen and sovereigns eager to intervene. There were not lacking humanitarians at home and abroad who argued for peace and appealed to their governments to proffer their good services. What is happening here now happened in Britain and in France in 1864. Had Abraham Lincoln been defeated, peace would have come as a result of foreign influence, but the American people perceived this and Abraham Lincoln was re-elected.

We Americans must remember our own history to-day. With the same clarity, the same vision which the great crisis in our history revealed half a century ago, the people of France and of Britain, the mothers



and the fathers of those who are dying in Flanders and Picardy, are envisaging the future. Their spirit, their will, their determination are what ours were; equal suffering has developed equal constancy, courage, inspiration.

Let us not forget what we escaped because our fathers and our mothers had the courage and the vision to suffer and endure. We are one country, with a single destiny and free from all the perils of frontiers and quarrels, because the war was fought to its finish and the question of secession was abolished for all time. Let us not forget that for democratic Europe our example is a precious example and an inspiring parallel.

Let us not forget, also, that peace now in Europe would be precisely the thing peace in 1864' would have been in America. Now, as then, the war is approaching its decision, but now, as then, the great question is not decided. Nor should any man or woman ever forget the great question. It was posed the hour in which Germany invaded Belgium. It was raised yesterday when German masters in Belgium adopted the methods of the ancient Pharaohs and drove a people before them into slavery. It was raised by the Lusitania, it is being raised in the plains of Rumania, where new reports of German barbarities reveal the fact that the German idea lives and marches still.

We have no interest in the question of frontiers; we have no stake or concern in the matter of the possession of Constantinople or the partition of Asia Minor. We are as little concerned with some of the incidental issues of the Great War as was Europe

with some phases of the Civil War. But we are interested in the preservation of humanity, of civilization and of law from the assault which the Germans have made upon them and the menace which a survival of the German idea would have for them.

The German has elevated the German interest and the German purpose above all that civilization has acquired in the centuries. He has proclaimed in advance of the present war that German necessity was above law, and he has practised this doctrine on all the fields of battle. Wherever German armies have gone there have been atrocities and brutalities, not those of war merely, but those organized, carefully and scientifically planned butcheries which are the lasting expression in blood of the meaning of Germanism in the world to-day.

The German method and the German ideal are old. Frederick the Great did in Silesia what William II. is doing in Belgium. At the end of the war he kept Silesia, and this encouraged his successors to new acts of equal immorality. For nearly two centuries the German idea, first Prussian, has marched from one war to another to accomplish the purpose of all Germans, the domination of Europe and the mastery of the world.

When the German people have resumed the control of their own government, when the German people have renounced the policies and the purposes of their rulers, then peace may come without the despoliation of Germany as peace came to France in Napoleon's time and left the France of the Ancient Regime undisturbed. But if Germany can remain as she is, if the German rulers can bring back from

this last terrible war of conquest a new Silesia, a new Alsace-Lorraine, a new Schleswig, then we shall have new wars until that time when at last the German idea is crushed in the blood and slime of a final defeat.

All that civilization means remains at stake. Nothing has yet been decided as to the momentous question raised by Germany in the first week of August, 1914, when she sent the vanguard of hosts into Belgium, to burn, to slay, to ruin a nation, because it stood between Germany and a purpose and dared to defend its honor and its independence. Those who fired Louvain and sank the *Lusitania* rule Germany; they remain faithful to the spirit of these crimes, and while this condition endures peace is impossible for long and peace now would be a crime against posterity.

Half a century cannot have completely obliterated in the American mind the memory of the great decision, the greatest decision of our national history. Democracy on this continent, perhaps in the world, was saved because the simple, loyal men and women of that brave time faced the new sacrifice and performed their terrible duty without flinching. No one who has heard the story of those days from the lips of those who were alive then can fail to realize how great, how crushing were their grief and sorrow, how hideous the war that they willed should continue.

To-day the vast mass of the men and women of France are facing the same tragedy with the same grim determination. Their hearts are torn as were the hearts of American men and women, but their wills remain unshaken, because there is in the men

and women of all races a nobility in the presence of the supreme hour which conquers all that is selfish, all that is weak. By this alone nations live and races survive from century to century.

This war was born of German determination to crush all that came between Germany and world domination. It was provoked after long preparation, it was prosecuted with fiendish brutality which endures to the present moment and with each succeeding month gives new proof of German spirit and German methods. It can only end when this German spirit is exorcised, whether it ends at the Rhine or the Spree, whether in 1917 or 1927. It can end only in one way, because to believe that it could end save in German defeat would be to believe that we were witnessing the end of all that makes for sweetness and light, for human happiness and human aspiration in this world.

To-day, as yesterday and all days since August, 1914, Belgium is the sign manual of German purpose. The spirit that was revealed in Belgium is a spirit with which there can be no compromise and no accommodation. All this the men and women of France and Britain see and realize. They, like our fathers and mothers, have made the great decision. They will endure to the end. Can we afford, with our history and the example in our minds of those who gave us liberty and preserved our country for us, to contribute in the slightest measure to the burden of suffering and grief which is the share of those who have willed that, whatever the cost, the German spirit shall not endure to bring new horrors and new tragedies to the generations that are to come?



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